

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A21

WASHINGTON POST
10 August 1986
(Late Edition)

Yurchenko Says CIA Tried to Link Pope Plot, Soviets

Russian Who Redefected Surfaces in Interview

By Celestine Bohlen
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Aug. 9—Vitaly Yurchenko, the Soviet defector who made a dramatic return to Moscow last November, has told a Moscow newspaper that the CIA tried to make him implicate the Soviet Union in the 1981 attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul II.

In today's edition of the city Communist Party newspaper Moskovskaya Pravda, Yurchenko said that while he was in CIA custody, agents also tried to get him to go public with Soviet plans for subverting Central America.

When he asked for proof of this Soviet activity, he was told not to worry, Yurchenko said in the article, materials and documents would be brought to him and he would only have to testify to their being genuine, he recalled being told.

"Our press will do what it can so people believe you," he quoted a Tom Fountain, identified as deputy CIA director, as saying. "It has had comparable experience."

[The Federal Executive Directory, which lists CIA personnel at the deputy director level, does not show anyone named Fountain. CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said the agency lists four of the five deputy directors. The fifth, deputy director of operations, is never publicly named by the agency.]

Yurchenko also said that Director of Central Intelligence William J. Casey told him in a meeting that it was necessary to persuade the world that all anti-American activity in Latin America was directed by Moscow.

Yurchenko said the CIA was preparing him to testify in Rome that the Soviet secret police, the KGB, had worked with Bulgarians in the plot against Pope John Paul II. Yurchenko was to play the part of someone named Malenkov, who supposedly had met in Sofia, Bulgaria, with Sergei Antonov, the Bulgarian airline official who was accused of conspiring with Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca. "Malenkov" would testify that he gave Agca 3 million West German marks for the job, Yurchenko said.

"In presenting me as a ranking KGB officer, the Americans hoped to give special weight to my testimony and to exert a decisive influence over the course of the Rome trial," he said.

Yurchenko, who has said he was an embassy security officer, disappeared from the Soviet Embassy in Rome in August 1985. When he appeared at the Soviet Embassy in

Washington in November, he said he had been kidnaped and coerced by the CIA.

At a subsequent press conference in Moscow he said that he "escaped" from his keepers by walking away from a Georgetown restaurant.

Last March, Yurchenko was spotted on a Moscow street and filmed by a West German television crew. But today's interview, called "The CIA's Kitchen of Falsehoods," is the first official public word from him since the November press conference.

The publication of the interview comes just two days after the Soviet news agency Tass announced that former CIA agent Edward Lee Howard had been granted political asylum in the Soviet Union.

Howard was a former CIA agent who in 1983 had been slated for a Moscow posting. He was sidetracked and later fired because he failed a polygraph test and a subsequent investigation revealed a history of alcoholism and drug use. By last fall, he was suspected of selling secrets to the Soviets.

Yurchenko's "redefection" and now Howard's defection have given the CIA two consecutive severe blows. The two cases are related, but with a twist worthy of a spy novel.

It was Yurchenko who apparently tipped U.S. intelligence to Howard's role in passing information to the KGB. Two months before Yurchenko returned to Moscow, Howard disappeared from his home in Santa Fe, N.M.

Now, Yurchenko and Howard are in the same country. There is speculation that Howard, like Yurchenko, will give a press conference in Moscow.

Yurchenko, in his interview today, disputed rumors that he had suffered or been punished since his return to Moscow.

"As you can see, I am alive and well and [western reports] do not correspond to reality," Yurchenko said at the start of the interview. He said that he had been under medical care during December and January and returned to his "old job" in March. He did not elaborate.

STAT

STAT